Do We Despise Novelists? Immensely!

At Least According to W. L. George, Who Asks: "Shall We Form a Trade Union and Establish a Piece Rate?"

THE English writer, W. L. George, in an article published recently in "Harper's," finds the position of the novelist to-day, particularly in England, a pretty hard and thankless one. "We novelists," he confesses, "are the showmen of life. We hold up its mirror, and, if it looks at us at all, it mostly makes faces at us." Prestige? Well, he suggests—

"make an imaginative effort; see yourself in the reception room of some rich man in New York, where a 'crush' of celebrities is taking place. A flunky at the head of the stairs announces the guests. He announces: 'Mr. Charles Evans Hughes! . . . Mr. W. D. Howells! . . . The Bishop of Oklahoma!' Who caused a swirl in the 'gilded throng'? The notable cleric? The former candidate for the Presidential chair? Or your premier novelist? Be honest in your reply to yourself, and you will know who, at that hypothetical reception, created a stir. The stir, according to place or period, greeted the politician or the bishop and only in purely literary circles would Mr. Howells have been preferred.

"For the worship of crowds goes to power rather than to distinction; to the recognized functionary of the state, to him whose power can give power, to all the evanescent things and seldom to those stockish things, the milestones on the road to eternity. The attitude of the crowd is the attitude of the state, for the state is only the crowd, and often just the mob; it is the chamberlain of ochlocracy, the leader, who follows.

"In all times the state has shown its indifference, its contempt, for the arts, and particularly for literature. Now and then a prince, such as Louis of Bavaria, Philip of Spain, Lorenzo the Magnificent, has given to literature more than respect. He has given love, but that only because he was a man before a prince. The prince must prefer the lawyer, the politician, the general, and indeed of late years what prince was found to patron George Meredith or Henry James?

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"THE attitude of the state to the novelist defines itself most clearly when a royal commission is appointed. In England royal commissions are ad hoc bodies appointed by the government from among men of political influence and special knowledge to investigate a special question.

"As a rule they are well composed. For instance, a royal commission on water supply would probably comprise two or three members of Parliament of some standing, the president of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a professor of sanitation, a canal expert, one or two trade unionists, one or two manufacturers, and a representative of the Home Office or the Board of Trade. Any man of position who has shown interest in public affairs may be asked to sit on a royal commission—provided he is not a novelist. Only one novelist has attained so giddy a height—Sir Rider Haggard. How it happened is not known; it must have been a mistake. We are not weighty enough, serious enough, to be called upon, even if our novels are so weighty and so serious that hardly anybody can read them. We are a gay tribe of Ariels, too light to discuss even our own trade. For royal commissions concern themselves with our trade, with copyright law, with the restriction of the paper supply.

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"YOU might think that, for instance, paper supply concerned us, for we use cruel quantities, yet no recognized author sat on the commission; a publisher was the nearest approach. Apparently there were two great consumers of paper, authors and grocers, but the grocers alone were consulted.

"What is the matter with us? Is our crime that we put down in indecent ink what we think and feel, while other people think and feel the same, but prudently keep it down? Possibly our crimes are our imagination and our tendency to carry this imagination into action.

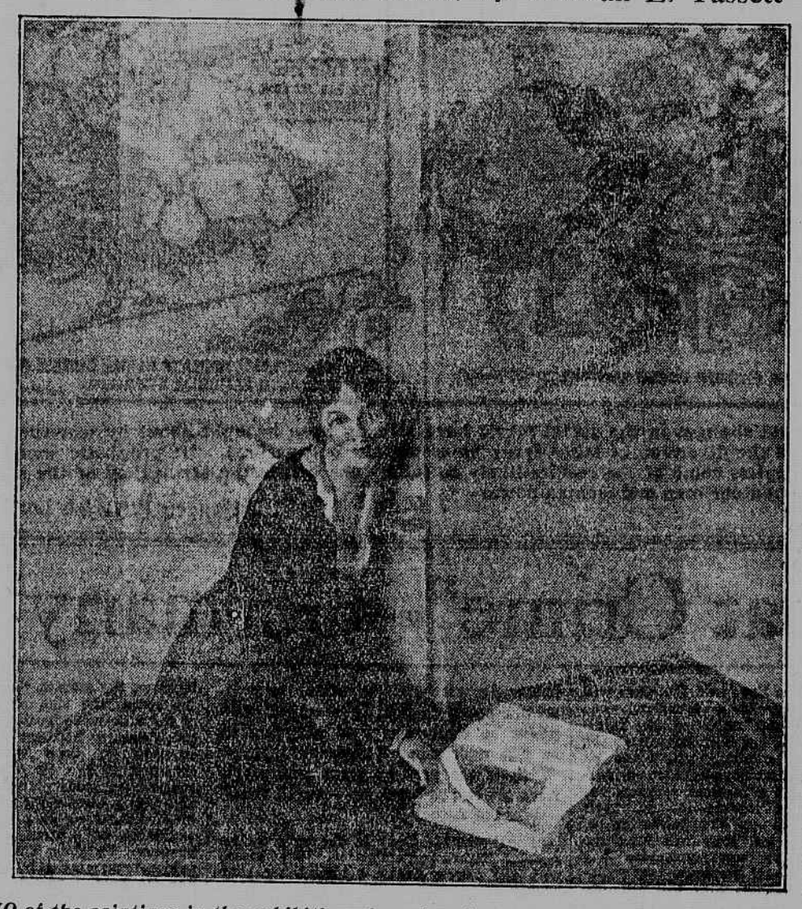
"Bismarck said that a state conducted on the lines of the Sermon on the Mount would not last twenty-four hours; perhaps it is thought that a state in the conduct of which a novelist had a share would immediately resolve itself into a problem play. Something like that, though in fact it is unlikely that Ariel come to judgment would be much more fanciful in his decrees than the historic Solomon.

"All this because we lack solidity—and yet the public calls us commercial, self-advertisers, money-grubbers. It is thought base that we should want three meals a day, though nobody suggests that we can hope to find manna in the street, or drink in our parks from the fountain Hippocrene. We are told that we make our contracts too keenly, that we are grasping, that we are not straight—and yet we are told that we are not business men. What are we to do? Shall we form a trade union and establish a piece rate? Shall we sell our novels by the yard? May we not be as commercial and respected as the doctor who heals with words and the lawyer who strangles with tape?"

Art Lends the Blind a Hand

Rotten Row, by Jean Chelminski

Arrangement in Gray and Black, by Truman E. Tassett



TWO of the paintings in the exhibition of works of art, to be sold for the benefit of the American-British-French-Belgian Permanent Blind Relief War Fund, that opened yesterday at the Anderson Galleries. The fund maintains, under the official direction of the French government, several American institutions in France for the rehabilitation of soldiers blinded in the war.

Old Shimbo's Magic, White and Black

He Could Do Wonderful Things With Queer Trinkets and Herbs. Also He Had a Keen Faculty for Bargaining

STEWART EDWARD WHITE'S latest book, "Simba," just published by Doubleday, Page & Co., contains a great deal of interestingly told lore of native Africa, "Africa real," as it is in one place called.

Take the case of Old Shimbo, who was a dealer in Magic—and found, by the way, that it commercialized quite easily. One turns to chapter two and reads:

"Old Shimbo, the witch-doctor, was full of business these days. Affairs had piled up on him, and as Shimbo was by now an aged man with the irascibility of one long in unopposed authority, he considered that he was having a hard time of it. . . .

"Old Shimbo dwelt in a little hut just within the village inclosure. His wives he kept next door in a larger hut, together with the considerable wealth he had accumulated. No one was ever allowed to enter the little hut. It was a queer kennel, hung with such matters as bits of skin, gourds filled with miscellaneous magic, iron bells on the ends of thongs, bones, dried herbs in packets. A couch of skins occupied one corner.

"From this Shimbo stirred his creaking bones only after the sun was well up. Then he huddled at his doorstep before a tiny fire over which bubbled a mysterious pot. One of his hags brought him food. The cattle had long since moved out from the village to the hills, and the people were busy with their accustomed routine. Shimbo muttered darkly to himself.

"To him came rather timidly a bright-faced young native, his arm around the waist of an attractive young woman. They stood waiting bashfully.

"'O Shimbo!' greeted the young man timidly.

"'What is it?' grunted Shimbo.

"The young man explained. He was owner of a new *shamba* or little farm, just beyond the village. His crops were ripening. Thieves were stealing the crops——

"Shimbo waived his skinny hand.

"'I have no time for such little things,' he croaked.

"The young man became urgent. He was newly married. These crops were all his wealth except—he would pay——. He drew from beneath his goat-skin robe an ornamented snuff-horn, which he offered. Shimbo snatched it, looked it over, thrust it beneath his own robe, and silently reached out his skinny hand. The consultant sighed and slowly produced a bead armlet. Shimbo examined this also. Apparently satisfied, he made a long arm into his hut and dragged from it a leopard skin, which he spread before him. On this he proceeded to spill one by one various seeds and pebbles from a gourd, first shaking them as one shakes dice. As each fell on the spotted skin he examined it closely, but without comment other than an occasional non-committal grunt. When the last pebble had fallen he sat for some time in silence. Then, gathering up the leopard skin, he disappeared into his hut. Emerging thence, he passed swiftly, for one so old, to the council tree. There a few words to the loungers conveyed his wishes. The whole masculine and a considerable of the feminine portions of the village followed him through the gates into the open fields.

"Arrived at the farm in question, he halted the spectators at the boundaries, while he himself, bent nearly double, traversed the field from end to end. Every ten feet or so he cast unguessable small objects on the ground, muttering strange gibberish over each. The people looked with awe. When Shimbo ended by thrusting stones and bundles of grass in tree crotches, they were not deceived. These were but blinds: the really potent magic was on the ground.

"Then the procession returned to the village, Shimbo hobbling, and muttering, a little in advance. There was no need for words. The crops were safe from theft, for every human being knew that the effect of Shimbo's magic was to bring on any one who touched it at night a sort of madness so that he would cry out loudly and so be caught. Shimbo sank back to his place in the sun with a groan. This was hard work."

* * *

HOWEVER, this was but a beginning. If this was hard work, harder was to follow. Very much harder. The writer reports that Old Shimbo wasn't left long in peace. For next—

"a strongly built middle-aged man with an evil face planted his spear and sat close to whisper his desires. He had an enemy, in another village—he went on at length detailing his grievances and the harm he had suffered——

"Shimbo cut him short. This was serious business, the business of a *mouiin*, who deals in black magic; not of a mere *mundu mue*, who knows only white magic. It must be paid. Ensued bargaining, at the satisfactory conclusion of which Shimbo went into executive session with himself.

"'Your enemy has come to visit this village to-day?' he demanded.

"'Of course, O *Mouiin*,' said the man. 'That I knew to be necessary.'

"For the second time Shimbo arose and followed his client to a sandy spot outside the village. The man led him to a little pile of leafy boughs laid on the ground. These being removed, disclosed the print of a foot. Shimbo spat carefully in this print, took up the wetted sand and wrapped it in a bit of skin.

"'Now the hyena,' he commanded. 'Is it far?'

"'Very near, O *Mouiin*,' replied the man respectfully.

"He guided Shimbo to the edge of a thicket where lay the body of a hyena freshly poisoned for this purpose. Shimbo fumbled in his robe, drew forth a tiny ceremonial knife, muttered a charm and then proceeded to cut off the beast's nose. Thereupon, followed by his client, he returned to his office.

"His next procedure was to empty his kettle and replenish it with a small quantity of fresh, but magic, water from a gourd. Into this he put the sand from the footprint, the hyena's nose, the dung of an ox and a dozen sorts of dried herbs. Muttering spells, he stirred this mixture until the water had boiled away. The residue he wrapped in a leaf which the client accepted. When the magic had quite dried to a powder, he would blow it from the palm of his hand toward his enemy. The enemy was thereupon done for. Doubt? None whatever. Shimbo knew that the chances of something happening to that enemy were pretty strong. And if the common accidents of life passed by, nevertheless that victim was sure to be informed that magic was out against him. Such is the power of mind over body among savages that he would quite likely give up and die anyway. His alternative was to get an antidote of Shimbo at a price. And if anything went wrong, Shimbo had at least five prearranged counter-accusations as to faulty procedure by the man who used the magic. As black magic comes high, and Shimbo's motto was 'cash in advance,' he felt well satisfied with the transaction."

Current War Poetry

"As Once in Sparta . . ."

SHE goes on knitting
As if the news were a hoax,
A sweet smile flitting
About her cool, kind mouth.
Her son, her only son,
A man, as David was one,
Loved by all Seven Oaks,
Was lost when the Northern Queen,
Trapped by a submarine,
Went down off Howth.

She attends to her chores
In her usual quick, calm way.
The town loudly deplores—
The dried-up spinsters aghast—
Her cold, what else but cold
Nature; all but one old
Granny of Gettysburg's day
Who fiercely takes her part,
Mumbling: "Ah, but her heart
Is at half-mast!"

—Richard Butler Glaenzer, in *The Forum.*

True Love at First Sight

MISS ROSALEE and Josephine
Are ladies we have met,—
Oh, don't get jealous; they just mean,
In *Fransay*, bayonet.

Now spiked peashooters, they may do
For the doughboys' wedded wives,
But the wagon-soldiers are true blue
To the pretty seventy-fives.

For us the rest are also rans,
Charlotte is the only one,
And her other name is *Swosontcans*,
And, lord! how she hates the Hun!

—H. R. Baukhage, in *Leslie's.*

The Girl He Didn't Leave Behind Him

THEY did not part! Their last good-bys
Were said,—but souls are winged and free,
And still he saw her constant eyes
Through all the watchful nights at sea.

When wistful war-waifs came to share
What he could give, her soldier knew
That she who clasped his child was there
To smile on those poor babies, too.

Above the trench her presence shone;
In charge and storm he saw her clear;
Upon the bed of pain, alone,
He heard her whisper, "I am here!"

And when, to crown a daring deed,
They gave him honors, glorified
His eyes beheld a dearer meed,—
Her vision, bright with joy and pride.

Dear Father, guard our gallant men
Within whose hearts is love enshrined,
And bring them safely home again
To those they cannot leave behind!

—Arthur Guiterman, in *McClure's.*

Slang

An English Writer Deplores the Progress of Colorful Substitutes for Sound English, and Says "Bolshevism Is Raining Language as Well as Society"

FREDERIC HARRISON is not at all pleased with the slangy style that has come into vogue in the press and in the utterances of public men since the war began. He writes as follows in "The Fortnightly Review":

"It is sad to see how the slang of the trenches and the camp, the rage to be topical and up to date, is infecting even our higher journalism and our parliamentary and platform oratory. Things are described with preposterous overstatement or under-statement, or are referred to with literary and historical commonplaces, nicknames and catchwords, until the ordinary man can hardly guess the sense, and is certainly worried by incessant tropes. Why not use plain words instead of trying to be so tediously funny, so smart? Why describe everything in comical allusions? Then come those stale American phrases which 'catch on.' A statesman now is 'out' for victory; he is 'up against' pacifism, and is all for the 'knock out.' He has a card 'up his sleeve' by which the enemy are at last to be 'euchred!' Then a fierce fight in which hundreds of noble fellows are mangled or drowned is 'a scrap.' When Germans murder civilians and burn churches this is 'not cricket.' To criticise a politician is to call for 'his scalp,' or for his 'head on a charger.' One minister is 'top dog'; the other fellow is beaten 'to a frazzle.' His supporters 'bark and howl,' or else offer mere 'eye wash.' Some one is forever 'riding for a fall,' and the eternal 'red herring' still misleads the pack. Then the iteration of some pet term—'orientation,' 'mentality,' 'a different angle,' 'quintessentially,' 'solidarity,' and 'self-determination.' Bolshevism is ruining language as well as society.

"It is natural that our fine fellows in the trenches and in the ships should come out of a horrible carnage and call it 'liveliness,' or a 'pretty thing.' But serious writers at home need not talk of the heroism of our men with a round of tiresome slang. And what bores me even more is to find the most acute problems of state reeled off with phrases manufactured out of popular novels."

Leading Articles in the Current American Magazines

Rat-a-tat-tat and a Bugle Call

Sunset

AN ARTICLE in the May issue of "Sunset Magazine," published in San Francisco, discusses the whys and wherefores, as well as the merits, of war songs which, sung every day by thousands of American soldiers, promise to live as part of the great story itself. The writer, Robin Baily, lays special stress upon the success of George M. Cohan's "Over There." In one place he says:

"Professor Arthur Conradi, a master of the violin and lecturer on the science and psychology of music to the Affiliated Medical Colleges of San Francisco, declares that Mr. Cohan's work has all the essential merits of a masterpiece. A composer is confined to certain limits in the art of music, he explains. There is nothing tangible in a melody, as in the case of a picture. The notes go in at one ear and out at the other. The musician must state his idea or motive, and his only means of impressing it on the mind of the listener is by judicious repetition. When the idea is good and repeated without monotony, the composer has succeeded. The most famous of all instances of the majestic reiteration of a simple three-note theme is Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which many think the noblest musical utterance of all time. The great German—the Germans were great in his day—heard a rapping on the door. It suggested the tap of the hand of Fate, and he wrote his deathless symphony. George M. Cohan took a bugle call, a three-note idea, like the rat-a-tat-tat on the door, and in the cold analytical view of a serious musician has written a war song that will live forever."

A Message from General Pershing

Century

GENERAL PERSHING sent the following message, published in the May "Century," to Mr. Charles H. Grasty, to be used as a foreword to his forthcoming book, "Flashes from the Front":

"This great war is teaching new things every day. War on such a scale affords unprecedented opportunity for originality. While methods change, human character remains and, other things being equal, character will decide the last battle.

"This war found us a nation nakedly unprepared, but our people had the stamina, the moral sense, the instinct for the light and the right. It is a fine thing to us soldiers in the service to look toward home and see a mighty people responding to the call of idealism, turning nobly toward duty in the splendid spirit expressed in the phrase, the 'utmost for the highest.' We may make mistakes here and there in this detail or in that, but we have the practical mind, and with each new experience we shall move to a higher level of excellence.

"Of the human material that America is sending to this war I can speak with exactness. It is the best, and with enough of such material there can be no doubt of America's showing. I have always had only one opinion of American soldiers, and that opinion has been more than confirmed in France. Given the opportunity, the American army in France will fulfil the best that has been expected of it."

John J. Pershing.

Colonel Roosevelt on Free Speech

Metropolitan

IN THE current number of this magazine, Colonel Roosevelt writes:

"Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the President or any other public official save exactly to the degree in which he himself stands by the country. It is patriotic to support him in so far as he efficiently serves the country. It is unpatriotic not to oppose him to the exact extent that by inefficiency or otherwise he fails in his duty to stand by the country. In either event it is unpatriotic not to tell the truth—whether about the President or about any one else—save in the rare cases where this would make known to the enemy information of military value which would otherwise be unknown to him.

"Sedition, in the legal sense, means to betray the government, to give aid and comfort to the enemy; or to counsel resistance to the laws or to measures of government having the force of law. There can be conduct morally as bad as legal sedition which yet may not be violation of law. The President—any President—can by speech or action (by advocating an improper peace, or improper submission to national wrong) give aid and comfort to the public enemy as no one else in the land can do, and yet his conduct, however damaging to the country, is not seditious; and although if public sentiment is sufficiently aroused he can be impeached, such course is practically impossible."

The Reign of Terror

Everybody's

BLAND WHITLOCK'S "Belgium" continues to be the most prominently featured offering in "Everybody's Magazine." The instalment appearing in the May number is called "The Reign of Terror." Writing of the German invasion of Dinant Mr. Whitlock declares that—

"suddenly, early on the morning of the 23d, German troops began pouring into the town from all four quarters. They came by the Lisogne road, by the Ciney road, by the Froidevaux road, but principally by La Montagne de St. Nicholas, and while the shells exchanged by the German artillery on the citadel with the French across the river were screaming overhead the soldiers turned the inhabitants out of doors, set the dwellings on fire, herded the people in a mass, and marched them across the city, their hands above their heads, to the Place d'Armes. The men were separated from the women and children, ranged in line, and from time to time during the day a few were selected, led out and shot. In the Leffe quarter alone the Germans shot thus 140, and at evening they shot the Argentine Consul and forty workmen in a factory. The terror lasted all that day and night. The Germans locked whole crowds of people in barracks, in stables, in factories, surrounded them by soldiers ready to fire at any moment, and in the St. Roch quarter they imprisoned a group in a building, placed bundles of straw all around the house and set it on fire; but by a fortunate chance the Germans overlooked a cellar window, and the people crawled one by one out of this and escaped.

"Women and children were forced to stand by and witness the murder of husbands and fathers. One woman, Mme. Alnin, who had given birth to a child three days before, was borne forth on a mattress by German soldiers, who said they would compel her to look on while they shot her husband, but her cries and supplications finally moved the soldiers to spare the husband's life."

"Over There"

—From *Sunset Magazine.*